THE WEEK AT THE THEATRES

BY ALAN DALE

DON'T be a bit suprised if in the course of a few years you find yourself confronted on the highways and byways of the city by such names as Sarah Bernhardt-Jones, or Eleonora Duse-Smith. The little husband and the big hyphen are getting in their "fine work," so to speak, and are coming to the front in an extremely seven-leagued manner. Time was when we smiled at the actress's husband just as radiantly as we still smile at her pug dog, her black alpaca mommer, and her bag of diamonds. Our flippancy has been brushed aside. The husband has loomed black and uxorious upon the horizon, and the hyphen has assumed the proportions of the fleshly band that joined the Siamese twins.

Julia Marlowe-Taber and Minnie Maddern-Fiske have rushed in upon us in dulcet connubial ecstacy, dragging along husbands and hyphens and posing as sweetly married dames. The time is not far distant when we may look at an exhibition of perambulators and nursing bottles, to say nothing of lactated foods and soothing syrups, in the lobbies of the theatres such actresses frequent. It is a beautiful argument in favor of footlight matrimony that they are plaintively urging, and perhaps it was necessary. After all, an actress's private life means a great deal to the public, and Duse is the only actress who has had the strength to resist the demands made upon her.

In the wake of Julia Marlowe-Taber and Minnie Maddern-Fiske we shall assuredly get such wedded artists as Rose Coghlan-Edgerly-Sullivan, Margaret Mather-Haberkorn-Pabst, Fanny Davenport-Price-McDowell, Lillian Russell-Braham-Solomon-Perugini and Bettina Gerard-Ordway-Paddelford-Raffael-Wolfe. The more the merrier in this frenzy of the domestic hearth. To be sure, it is rather difficult to follow the windings of our stage favorites through the matrimonial labyrinths, but nothing is impossible to the trained intelligence. Henceforth, instead of bruising our energies with such meaningless problems as "find the cat," or "cherchez la femme," we shall be obliged to devote ourselves to the excruciating but meritorious task of spearing husbands upon hyphens. It will be a charming game for Winter evenings, infinitely superior to bezique or cribbage.

The actress can no longer evade her interviewer with the poetic retort, "I am wedded to my art." The unwedded actress will feel ashamed of herself, and hyphens will be at a premium.

Looking at the matter in cold blood—and the clinical thermometer insists that we do this—I can't help thinking that the new condition of things is awfully nice for the husbands, especially when they happen to be nobodies. It is very hard to establish a reputation. Years of incessant toil, courageous effort and persistent ardor are generally needed. Men slave at the task and see their youth wrinkled into ugly senescence in the effort. Henceforth it will be easy to be successful, if success means the respect of the majority. Marry an actress and tack your name to hers by a hyphen. For, as Nordau says: "Almost all men are striving toward one single end—external success in the world. Without this success it is impossible for life to contain any pleasures for them. This is the point of view of nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand. And perhaps, in reality, the number of those who require anything more from life than external success is even less than I have assumed."

In the case of Julia Marlowe-Taber, with a young husband in her company playing Romeo to her Juliet, and Charles Marlow to her Kate Hardcastle, the public will not be long in realizing the beatitude of her condition. It will take time in the case of Minnie Maddern-Fiske, because the curiosity-mongers will want to know who Fiske is when he's at home. He is not a member of Mrs. Maddern's company; his name appears in no cast; he is apparently as Mrs. 'Arris; he is an outsider and the public will be forced to accustom themselves to him gradually. It seems rather cruel, at first sight. Mrs. Maddern has devoted a lifetime to the manufacture of a trademark. She was a child actress, and her name has been before theatre-goers for many years. Then she leaves the stage, decides to return, and does so with a husband. But this husband is very greedy. He is not satisfied with a mere hyphen. The Minnie Maddern portion of the actress's name is typed very diminutively. It is the Fiske that flashes upon you as you sit in the elevated trains or the cable cars, and you can scarcely be blamed if you feel the temporary froissement that the name of a stranger generally awakens in the American mind.

Still, perhaps it is just as well. We have believed for too long that our actresses scorned mere domesticity and disdained the manufacture of slippers for hubby's feet, and blazers for hubby's body. A better time has at last arrived, thanks to Julia Marlowe-Taber and Minnie Maddern-Fiske. Husbands, like murder, will out, and women must work while men must weep.

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I'll be respectful. I'll cry "Mea culpa!" I swore that I would never call Minnie Maddern anything but Minnie Maddern, for I'm very fond of her, and always have been. I find, however, that to be in the swim, I must speak of her as Mrs. Fiske, and I'll do it, for what's the use of living if you are not in the swim? My admiration for Mrs. Fiske caused me to grieve deeply at her return to New York in such an atrocious play as "Marie Deloche," produced last Monday night at the Garden Theatre.

It purports to be an adaptation of a play by Alphonse Daudet and Louis Hennique, by Harrison Grey Fiske. The work of an adapter, nowadays, has grown arduous. In adapting a French play, the labor does not end when the drama has been done into banal and second-class English. The piece must be made intelligible to the conditions of the people who are called upon to look at it. In fact it is as difficult to make a successful adaptation as it is to write a new play. Adapters should be men of great literary ability, which Mr. Fiske most assuredly is not.

In London they are raving about Coppee's "Pour la Couronne," because a superb, poetic adaptation has been made of it by John Davidson. As Clement Scott says: "An author who can make a successful 'For the Crown' out of 'Pour la Couronne,' and never tire one single soul in the audience, deserves a medal and the congratulations of the play-going public. The great complaint against 'Pour la Couronne' was that it was hopelessly dull and desperately tedious. As seen in London it was uniformly interesting, and splendidly dramatic." This was entirely due to the adapter.

"Marie Deloche," however, has been simply tossed upon the stage, Englished in a schoolboy fashion. It is a dreadful play, both morbid and maudlin, but literary nicety would have gone a long way toward redeeming some of its many imperfections. Old melodramatic "gags" were introduced, and the audience had a shock when they heard the Countess Nattier exclaim to her refractory boy, "You are no longer a son of mine." That phrase has passed into burlesque, and it alienated its hearers instantly from any sympathy with Marie or her surroundings.

Marie was inclined to be a hopeless case, anyway. Her past was so voluminous and sickening that she was completely out of date. We have had such a dose of these women that we were looking forward to better things, especially as "constant readers" and "lovers of the stage," and dramatic editorial writers had been assuring us, in fond confidence, that the taste of the public had completely changed, and that managers would henceforth be forced to supply romantic plays, historical dramas and "Prisoner of Zenda" episodes.

Marie married an artist early in life, and "found no happiness." I can quite believe that. I shouldn't imagine that the poor artist found much either, but women get all the sympathy with the morbid problem makers. Then she went to Cuba with a rich planter, who deserted her. Perhaps he thought that as Cuba was trying so hard to be free, he would emulate its worthy example. So he shook poor Marie, who returned to Paris, leaving her past behind her.

In the Chateau Nattier she captivates the adolescence of a foolish youth named Marcel, who wears a worried look and an alpine hat with gay insouciance. That is what causes Mrs. Nattier to exclaim: "You are no longer a son of mine. I have no child." Marie marries Marcel, however, and there is a great powwow about it. To maintain her position she is obliged to lie like a trooper, and this she does in a somewhat amusing way. In the second act she leads "a dual life." We are so heartily sick of dual lives that a solitary existence has come to be a positive novelty. Marie is lured to duality by the Cuban planter, who has wearied of his freedom and has come back to civilization big with blackmail.

Poor Marie is obliged to visit him daily—a rude and unladylike proceeding, much admired in French novels, but almost unintelligible to New Yorkers, who are accustomed to nose around their neighbors' affairs with airy but pertinacious curiosity. So Marie goes to see her Cuban every afternoon and comes back to dine with Marcel every night. She wears a black dress with jet on it while she is doing this. Any other garb, according to the traditions of the stage so deftly upheld by Mr. Fiske, would have been indecent. And Marie is a "perfect lydy," of course, even while she is what Bessie Bellwood would call "a nasty, rude person."

Her past, however, continues to overwhelm her. Like an avalanche it rushes upon her. Not only does the gentleman she kept house with in Cuba make her life miserable, but the artist whom she married, and with whom she "found no happiness," appears. To do her justice, she had firmly believed him to be dead. She had imagined that he was gathered unto his foremothers and was at rest. Husbands in this sort of play, however, have nine lives, like cats. You can't kill 'em. You can see 'em in their shrouds, but even then you are not safe. They are bound to come back, sooner or later, for a "situation." They always want a situation, like the gentleman in Digby Bell's song.

To avoid further unpleasantness, however—although I can't see that there was the least excuse for any of the unpleasantness forced upon us—Marie takes poison, unwilling to create jealousy between her two husbands. You are not a bit sorry when she dies. You owe her a grudge because she didn't take poison in the first act. She waited until the close of Act III., and killed herself after having won your enthusiastic disgust. What vexes me about a play of this sort is the hypocritical effort to invest it with a psychological value that is never in evidence. I am very fond of plays with a moral, and I would frequently relegate the Young Person to the nursery. I love social studies, and admire Ibsen and Zola intensely, but the excuse for this "Marie Deloche" is so vapid that it excites ire.

Here it is. It was sent to me marked "Garden Theatre; not duplicated. Compliments A. M. Palmer:" "'Marie Deloche' * * * presents a story that shows the effects of heredity and environment. Marie Deloche is the natural outgrowth of such a union as that of a "half-world mother" (what on earth is a "half-world" mother? Can it have anything to do with "demi-monde?") "and her diplomat of a father. She is the result in her maturer years of the surroundings of her early life, and even the great love that comes to her, the one and only true thing of her whole life, intense and soul-absorbing as it is, cannot overcome the evil that nature has implanted in her; that corrodes with its subtle poison the good within her, that all in vain strives to manifest itself, and to give her the peace and happiness that her better self longs for with insatiable craving."

This explanation, by the bye, affords an excellent example of the obscure English in which the play was written. It should have been printed upon the programmes with diagrams.

Mrs. Fiske herself struggled hard to make Marie Deloche possible and interesting. She failed creditably. The little actress, however, showed us that she has lost none of the qualities that endeared her to us years ago. She is charming, dainty, unusual and intelligent. I will not be so grotesque as to make a Bernhardt or a Duse of her. She is a pleasing, natural, intellectual actress, and one who could be an ornament to the American stage. She never poses, she never runts, she indulges in no tricks, she wears no diamonds and she dresses quietly and unassumingly.

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Julia Marlowe—pardon, me, Mrs. Robert Taber—caused us to twitter gleefully when she gave us her lovely interpretation of Juliet Capulet—pardon me, of Mrs. Romeo Montague. She was the ideal Mrs. Montague, and we rejoiced at the discovery. The disenchantment came when Mrs. Robert produced "She Stoops to Conquer" at Palmer's Theatre, Monday night, for it showed us her limitations. The young actress made a pretty and a pleasing Kate Hardcastle, but she was lacking in womanly depth and in dash. She failed to dominate, and the consequence was that Mr. Robert walked off with the laurel wreath.

I suppose he said to her, "Look here, dear, You had your innings as Juliet. Now perhaps you will kindly allow me to have a show with Charles Marlow. I'm yours for better or worse, you know. There is a hyphen between us. I insist upon producing 'She Stoops to Conquer,' because I know that you can't play Kate Hardcastle, and that I can play Charles Marlow."

Under the new regime we can't afford to disregard curtain lectures. Some such argument as the above was surely urged by Mr. Robert to induce Mrs. Robert to consent to "She Stoops to Conquer." The Kate Hardcastle of Mrs. Robert was far too ingenuous and shrinking. She made nothing of the part. She was all on the surface, and there was no suggestion of anything beneath it. Kate masqueraded as the inn-damsel just for pure schoolgirl glee, and Charles Marlow to her was a mere detail. It was a pallid and a superficial performance, that awakened no interest in Miss Hardcastle and rendered Charles unduly prominent.

Duse can give the impersonation of girlhood to our intelligence, but she cannot thrust it under our eyes. A Juliet with gray hair might overwhelm our artistic appreciation, but what chance would she have with an admirable Juliet who looked the age prescribed by Shakespeare?

Mrs. Robert has a peculiar treasure, and with it she can sway us whenever she chooses. If she cannot present the complex idea of womanhood she can at least delight us with the picture of pellucid girlhood. Still, we cannot endure girlhood all the time. It palled upon us in Miss Hardcastle, and the last time I saw Mrs. Robert as Rosalind—she was then a Miss Marlowe—it was equally in evidence. I presume that Mrs. Robert will lose her naivete before she has been a matron very long, and then it will be time enough for her to tackle the many-sided roles. Juliet and Parthenia are simply arch maidens stirred by one solitary passion, without any of its variations. Miss Hardcastle is very otherwise.

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The Charles Marlow of Robert Taber was a most commendable piece of work. The young man never strained for effects, and his humor was quite spontaneous. I enjoyed that scene between Marlow, Hastings and Mr. Hardcastle immensely. It was capitally acted by Taber and William F. Owens. The Mrs. Hardcastle of Mrs. Sol Smith was also creditable, although the old actress mumbled rather irritatingly at times. Tony Lumpkin was a great disappointment as interpreted by Edmund Lawrence. Stuart Robson thought this part good enough to "star" in; it has always been a favorite comedian role. Therefore is it all the more surprising that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Taber paid so little attention to it.

This engagement of the Tabers, however, has been vastly interesting. They will come back to us buoyed up with hope. They were afraid of New York, which has the reputation out of town—goodness knows why—of being the most fastidious city in the United States.

Fastidious it is not, quaint and inexplicable it undoubtedly is. Entertainments that would be hooted in Oshkosh and Skowhegan succeed in New York. That is the eccentricity of the metropolis. Mr. and Mrs. Taber, however, need not fear. We like them very much indeed. We have grown quite attached to them. Parting will be, indeed, sweet sorrow, and we shan't be satisfied in future to allow them to roam about the wild, untrammelled West.

And, after all, New York discovered Mrs. Taber. Yes, it did. Go along, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Red Bank. You had nothing to do with the case, tra-la. We discovered Mrs. Taber—she was then a Miss Marlowe—at the Bijou Theatre eight years ago, where we went with frost in our heads to see her play Parthenia in "Ingomar." She belongs to us—and to Mr. Taber, of course. Still, we even introduced her to Mr. Taber. He can thank us for the hyphen, and all that it implies.

Aubrey Boucicault and Sadie Martinot (I almost wish for the sake of harmony in my work to-day that I could call them Mr. and Mrs. Boucicault) are going back to "The Shaughraun" at the American Theatre to-morrow night. They found that they could make no headway against the tangled mass of cobwebs that have accumulated around "The Colleen Bawn." That good old Irish drama has sprouted moss, and it is no longer fit food for big boys and girls. Mortgages and marriage certificates can nourish us no more. We have given them up to the goats, and we clamor for something more highly flavored. "The Colleen Bawn" seems primitive to-day, for it was most certainly not written to endure. It was not the work of a genius, but of an industrious gentleman who believed that the pot should be kept boiling at all risks. That the play is even presentable to-day is a great tribute to the late Dion Boucicault, who never posed as a classic. I can promise you that some of the shamrock effusions dished up in the popular price houses at the present time will be absurd five years from now.

Mr. Boucicault and Miss Martinot, however, made a most commendable effort to excavate "The Colleen Bawn" from the ruin of years. The young actor is almost an aggressively magnetic individual, and, as I have pointed out before, his future will be brilliant if he will forget himself in his work. Young Mr. Boucicault, however, is exceedingly fond of young Mr. Boucicault. There is no getting away from that fact. He feels that he is all there, and he impresses that fact upon his audience. He is undoubtedly a most talented young actor, and if I must praise his Myles-na-Coppaleen very highly, his Con, the Shaughran, is entitled to much commendation.

And Sadie! It really does seem absurd to talk of her success in common Irish plays. Imagine Mrs. Potter shelving her clothes and donning the garbs of Elly O'Connor. You laugh at the idea. It is no more incongruous than that offered us by Miss Martinot. In spite of the excellent work she did in "The Colleen Bawn," I could scarcely help regarding her as Mlle. O'Connor, of Paris, just returned from a ride on the Bois and rehearsing Irish jokes for fun—or charity. (They are very much the same nowadays.) She tried very hard to make Elly's dress as stylish as she could, and when Danny Mann tried to drown her in the cave she wore a sweet little red cloak the like of which could certainly not be purchased in Fourteenth street.

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I've no doubt that Sadie got even with this exceedingly non-sartorial part by wearing her famous diamond garters. As she did not show them, she certainly cannot be blamed if she used them. An actress like Miss Martinot cannot be on good terms with herself unless she can sport some tokens of opulence. Sadie is undoubtedly an artist fitted out with a good stock of vigorous self-repression. Otherwise she would have worn a sortie de bal, trimmed with ermine, to be drowned in. I'm sure that she owns several, and it was sheer submission to art that kept them from the stage. Bronson Howard once introduced us to a lady who possessed a gorgeous white satin, decollette gown, which she insisted upon wearing in a scene on the Rocky Mountains. Miss Martinot reminded me of this lady toned down by rigid abstinence.

I am not going to forget Amelia Bingham, even though she hasn't reached the dignity of black type, and no Christian name, like Miss Martinot and Mr. Boucicault. Her impersonation of Anne Chute was delightful, and there is a vein of comedy in this young woman's disposition that the metropolis cannot afford to overlook. She is also exceedingly good-looking, and her red wig was quite as nice as Sadie's red wig, and just as becoming. The other members of the Boucicault-Martinot company were from fair to middling. I missed "Miss Louise Massen" from "The Colleen Bawn" cast.

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Chevalier, the idealized Chimmie Fadden, of London, is here, waiting to introduce himself to New Yorkers at Koster & Bial's to-morrow night, after the electric lights and the twirling skirts of Miss Loie Fuller have been swept up. Chevalier was always a trifle afraid of America, because he believed that the coster dialect would scarcely be understood over here.

Not understand Chevalier, forsooth! The trouble is that New Yorkers will understand him too well. He speaks the English language in a peculiar coster way, that is all. No libretto will be necessary. I understand that William A. McConnell contemplated the usual Bernhardt-Duse-Italian-opera-arrangement for the ushers to sell—"Books of Mister Chevalier's songs, in coster and English, price fifteen cents; twenty-five inside. The only authentic version."

They will be perfectly unnecessary. Even Yvette Guilbert's ditties were not translated, although that may have been due to the fact that they were a trifle too shocking. Chevalier's songs are strictly proper and genuinely amusing. Musically they are delightful. They are the sort of songs you can revel in as you sit at your own piano. "The Little Nipper," "Liza 'Awkins," "Knocked 'Im in the Old Kent Road" and "I dunno where 'e are" are gems in their way.

Chevalier's art-loving friends may talk in a lordly way about his magnificent opportunities to create legitimate character roles in the drama of to-day. That sort of talk does no harm, but it is extremely silly. Chevalier made no hit when he was a common or garden actor. Nobody ever heard of him until he took to the music halls. It is extremely unlikely that anybody would ever hear of him if he left them. That kind of chatter is on a par with the drivel that would give Yvette Guilbert to the Comedie Francaise. Chevalier is of the halls and for the halls, and when New Yorkers have seen him, I feel quite convinced that they will not be at all anxious to urge him to engage himself to either Augustin Daly or Charles Frohman.

ALAN DALE.